

# ATTIRE

## Bridal

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# Starting *out*

We speak to new boutique owner Lynn Charrington about specialising in bridalwear for fuller-figured women.

## As a new bridal boutique, what initially inspired you to specialise in plus-size bridal?

I got engaged in December last year, and being a high street size 26 I was somewhat apprehensive. I was worried about the experience, but definitely didn't want to settle for a style or type of dress that someone might typically associate with a plus-size bride. I was looking for a wow factor, a dress that would make me look and feel amazing. This made me even more apprehensive as I wasn't sure I'd find it.

"I was upset that as a plus-size bride, I wasn't able to find the styles I wanted. So I decided to do something about it and am now able to offer those in a similar situation to me a solution."

I initially spoke with some dress makers and, though they could have made me something amazing, I couldn't tell what it looked like until it was finished so it was too much of a risk. I wanted to avoid 'skinny' bridal shops as I knew I wouldn't feel comfortable with the staff, or having to go hide in a backroom somewhere. So, I started looking for plus-size options. I knew my choice would be limited, but I couldn't find a specialist boutique within a few hours' drive of Bath – my home town. Even after finding some, the websites looked old fashioned and I wasn't sure I'd find my perfect dress there. Once I arrived, I was expecting to find options that fitted me, but the dresses in my size were all old-fashioned and quite underwhelming, mainly just A-line. I wanted to try on the more exciting gowns that they only held in a size 16 or 18. I also found a dress I fell in love with that went up to my size, but no one in the country held it

in anything above a size 12 so I couldn't try it on. I was upset that as a plus-size bride, I wasn't able to find the styles I wanted. So I decided to do something about it and am now able to offer those in a similar situation to me a solution. We stock fabulous dresses in a range of styles, in sizes that will actually fit when the bride tries them on.

## Which designers are you stocking and why?

I wanted to focus on designers that had considered plus-size brides during their design process. Things like slightly higher backs, stronger boning, flattering designs etc. This is why I am stocking Callista and Sonsie. They each have beautiful gowns in such a wide range of styles which was hugely important to me. I also did a lot of research into which designers went up into larger sizes. These designers often create beautiful gowns but not all would be suitable for a larger bride. So, I will also be stocking Cara Mia, Allure Woman and some designs from Madison James. I carefully looked at all the dresses they offered, the style, where they would pull you in, how high the backs were etc. to narrow down the actual dresses I would be stocking. I am so pleased that I can offer such beautiful gowns to plus-size brides. I was actually quite surprised at the wide range of options available to me as so many boutiques do not hold the larger size samples, even if they can go up to that size.

## Which accessories are you currently stocking and why?

I have spent a long time looking for plus-size bridal lingerie and undergarments. I was really struggling to find them and was starting to get quite disheartened. Then I found Jupon at The Harrogate Bridal Show. They have an excellent

range of petticoats and corsets up to a 48F. I have also ordered a garter option and umbrellas from there too. I am hoping to find some other lingerie options that will go up into the 50 plus. I am also going to be stocking a beautiful range of veils from Elizabeth Dickens. Their range is huge and I can offer my brides anything they could possibly want and more.

## Why do you feel it's so important to specialise in plus-size bridal, rather than offer a plus-size collection within a more general mix of bridal designs?

As a plus-size bride myself I know the insecurities we can feel. I did not want my brides to feel uncomfortable or feel like they were just visiting a back room. I am passionate about providing plus size brides the same choice, opportunity and experience a thinner bride would be provided with, without feeling like they were an add on to another bridal boutique. This is the most important part of it all to me.

## When do you open and are you planning a special launch day to mark the occasion?

I opened in the second week of October which was incredibly exciting. I have decided to hold a big launch party and catwalk at the end of January to celebrate and to invite brides that I have already spoken with. It will also give me a chance to wait for all the dresses I have ordered to come in and to develop contacts with other suppliers and models (as well as some real life plus size brides). **A**



### CONTACT

Perfect Princess Bridal  
[www.perfectprincessbridal.com](http://www.perfectprincessbridal.com)

## MICHELE O'NEILL, CALLISTA

[www.callistabride.com](http://www.callistabride.com)

### What can retailers expect from the 2016 Callista collection?

We continue to push forward with fashion forward styles – this season we've included little matching jackets, veils and illusion capes.

### Which gown do you predict will be a best-seller and why?

Our new best seller is a style called Bangkok, a slim style lace dress with a matching jacket and veil. The design really flatters the shape of the bride while the lace is very unusual and is adorned with freshwater pearls.

### What is the size range of the collection?

Callista is available from a UK size 18 to 34. We do also offer made-to-measure for a small extra charge, for those brides who don't fit into our size range.

### What percentage of your stockists exclusively sell plus-size?

I think only around 10 per cent are just plus-size shops, but we anticipate that this number will grow over the coming years.

### How has the demand for plus-size gowns changed since you first launched Callista?

The demand has grown tenfold. Although we have always made gowns up to size 34, the Callista collection is designed with construction and styling for fuller-figured brides – it's not just a scaled-up regular dress.



## VIVIEN FELSTEIN, VEROMIA

[www.veromia.co.uk](http://www.veromia.co.uk)

### What can retailers expect from the 2016 Sonsie collection?

Retailers can expect more beautiful best-selling dresses from Sonsie. This season we've gone for an elegant look, and dresses are available with a hint of colour.

### Which gown do you predict will be a best-seller and why?

I believe Son 91507 will sell well. This is an elegant and simple dress made from satin, with some beautiful but blingy beading.

### What is the size range of the collection?

Our collection ranges from a size 18 to size 32. We also provide a made-to-measure service.

### What percentage of your stockists exclusively sell plus-size?

This is quite a niche market so stand-alone plus-size shops are few and far between. I would say around 10 per cent.

### How has the demand for plus-size gowns changed since you first launched the Sonsie collection?

Our Sonsie collection has become more and more popular as shops take on board that there are a lot of plus-size brides out there who are willing to spend money on their bridal gown, but can't buy on the internet or just a normal bridal gown in a bigger size. The plus-size bride needs support in all the right places and Sonsie fits the bill for the curvy, confident woman.

## RACHAEL ROWLES, ALLURE WOMEN

[www.allurebridals.com](http://www.allurebridals.com)

### What can retailers expect from the 2016 Allure Women collection?

We focused on texture and structure when designing our 2016 Allure Women collection.

As the winner of the Bridal Buyer 2014/5 Plus Size Bride Award, retailers can expect us to continue our pursuit of excellence in our award-winning bridal designs, while producing stunning gowns to accommodate and flatter every woman.

Each of the Allure Women gowns is designed with the same care and attention to detail we pour into every aspect of our collections. We design the Allure Women collection with our brides in mind – we want them to feel completely beautiful, comfortable and thrilled on their big day.

With this in mind, we offer the same styles in our main collections and mirror them into our Women collection. This is a big selling point for our retailers, as brides would never know the difference if they saw our dresses in the shop.

The most important selling point for a retailer is that we have a different size chart for Allure Women to ensure the dress is cut for the curvier bride, helping to flatter their curves and also the structure is different internally to give them the best shape possible, without them feeling labelled as a plus-size bride.



### Which gown do you predict will be a best-seller and why?

Allure Women W330 will undoubtedly continue to make strides in the bridal market, due to a universally flattering silhouette. You'd be hard pressed to find more on-trend details, from lace to Swarovski crystal beadwork to a keyhole back.

### What is the size range of the collection?

Our Allure Women Collection starts at a US size 14. It has a completely different size chart to our other Allure Bridals collections.

We understand that the curvier brides deserve to have the dresses cut to a slightly different pattern to the dresses that look identical in our main collections.

This, teamed with our patented construction, is an ideal design element for fuller-figured women, as it not only promotes the dress' shape, but keeps our brides incredibly comfortable.

### What percentage of your stockists exclusively sell plus-size?

We're continuing to take on new stockists of our Women collection on a daily basis, several of whom specialise in plus-size.

Our stockists include Heavenly Bodies Bridal, Curvaceous Bridal, A Class Brides, Bridal 88, POSH of Eastbourne, Lisa's Bridalwear, Rossetti Brides Ltd and Shades of White.

### How has the demand for plus-size gowns changed since you first launched Allure Woman?

The fashion world has opened its eyes to the diversity of image in the past years. Women of all shapes and sizes have always been beautiful, but this perspective has been embraced more recently in the bridal fashion industry – so the demand for more plus-sized gowns has increased dramatically. This is so exciting and we're proud to design gowns to make every bride-to-be shine her brightest on one of her most important life events. **A**